

# **ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME**

## **DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES**

### **NEWS RELEASE**



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## **2017 KOTZEBUE SOUND SALMON SEASON SUMMARY**

### **COMMERCIAL SALMON FISHERY**

In 2017, the Kotzebue Sound District commercial salmon fishery had three buyers, Copper River Seafoods (CRS), Maniilaq dba Arctic Circle Wild Salmon and Pacific Star. CRS and Pacific Star were the major buyers. Maniilaq did not begin buying until August 9.

The commercial salmon season opened on July 10 and closed by regulation after August 31. Commercial fishing was allowed six days a week with no fishing on Saturday, except an additional day closure on August 6 to allow more salmon to pass through the commercial fishing district. The first week of the season fishing was open for 11 hours daily and the following week through July commercial fishing was usually open for 8 hours Sunday through Friday. In August commercial fishing periods were 14 hours. The additional fishing time in August was possible this year because of a floating processor vessel arriving that eliminated restricting fishing time based on airplane cargo capacity to move the fish out of Kotzebue.

In the commercial salmon fishery, gear is limited to set nets with an aggregate of no more than 150 fathoms per permit holder. Fishermen generally operate with one end on or near shore and also set in deeper channels from the mud flats farther out from shore. Most gear used in the district is 5-3/4 inch to 6-inch stretch mesh gillnet.

The commercial harvest figure of 463,749 chum salmon was the sixth highest in the 56-year history of the fishery. No chum salmon were kept for personal use, but 115 Chinook salmon, 129 sockeye salmon, 1,017 pink salmon, 58 coho salmon, 523 Dolly Varden, 349 sheefish and 1 whitefish were reported in the catch and kept for personal use. Likely, additional fish kept for personal use were not reported on fish tickets.

The 2017 harvest was the second highest in over 30 years and was only the seventh time the harvest exceeded 400,000 chum salmon. There were 100 permit holders that sold chum salmon in 2017. This year's participation by permit holders was 16% above last year's participation when 86 permit holders sold fish (Figure 1 and Table 1), and was the second highest permit holder participation in over 20 years. The highest daily fishing effort occurred on August 7 when 74 permit holders fished.

A total of 3,832,578 pounds of chum salmon (average weight 8.3 lbs.) was sold at an average of \$0.48 per pound. This year's average price was 45% higher than last year's price of \$0.33 per pound. The total exvessel value was \$1,839,637 and was 64% more than last year and was only the third time since 1988 that the value was over one million dollars. The historical average exvessel value of fishery was \$649,985 without adjusting for inflation (Table 1).

Age, sex and length composition (ASL) was taken from commercial catch samples, but was not used to manage the fishery. The majority of the chum salmon each year are usually four- and five-year-old fish. In 2017, commercial catch samples were 6% age-0.2 fish, 65% age-0.3 fish, 26% age-0.4 fish and 3% age-0.5 fish. The age composition was similar to previous years.

### **ESCAPEMENT**

Primary fishery management objectives are to provide adequate chum salmon escapement throughout the duration of the commercial fishery to ensure sustainability of the fishery and to provide for the subsistence priority. A test fishery conducted on the Kobuk River provides the only inseason escapement index of the Kotzebue Sound District.

This year's test fish chum salmon CPUE cumulative index at the department test fish project on Kobuk River near Kiana was 2,097 and was the eighth highest in the 25-year project history.

No aerial surveys were conducted in 2017 because of high water.

### **SUBSISTENCE SALMON FISHERY**

No subsistence salmon surveys are scheduled. Subsistence harvesters reported in late July that they were having trouble getting salmon near Noorvik. The Nazuruk Channel passes by Noorvik, but a second channel, Melvin Channel, passes several miles to the north before both channels of the Kobuk River connect farther upriver. The department examined Kobuk River test fish data and noticed that a higher percentage of chums were being caught on the north bank than the south bank. Because that has only happened in 2 of the 24 previous years the department believed the majority chum salmon were not passing Noorvik and were moving upstream via the Melvin Channel. Two subsistence fishing sites on Melvin Channel were having good catches on chum salmon. The department did have a two day break in the commercial fishery to allow more chum salmon to move upstream and in August the south bank catch began to exceed the north bank catch and catches also improved in Noorvik. For the season the chum salmon catch index on the south bank exceeded the north bank by 2 to 1 at the test fish site.

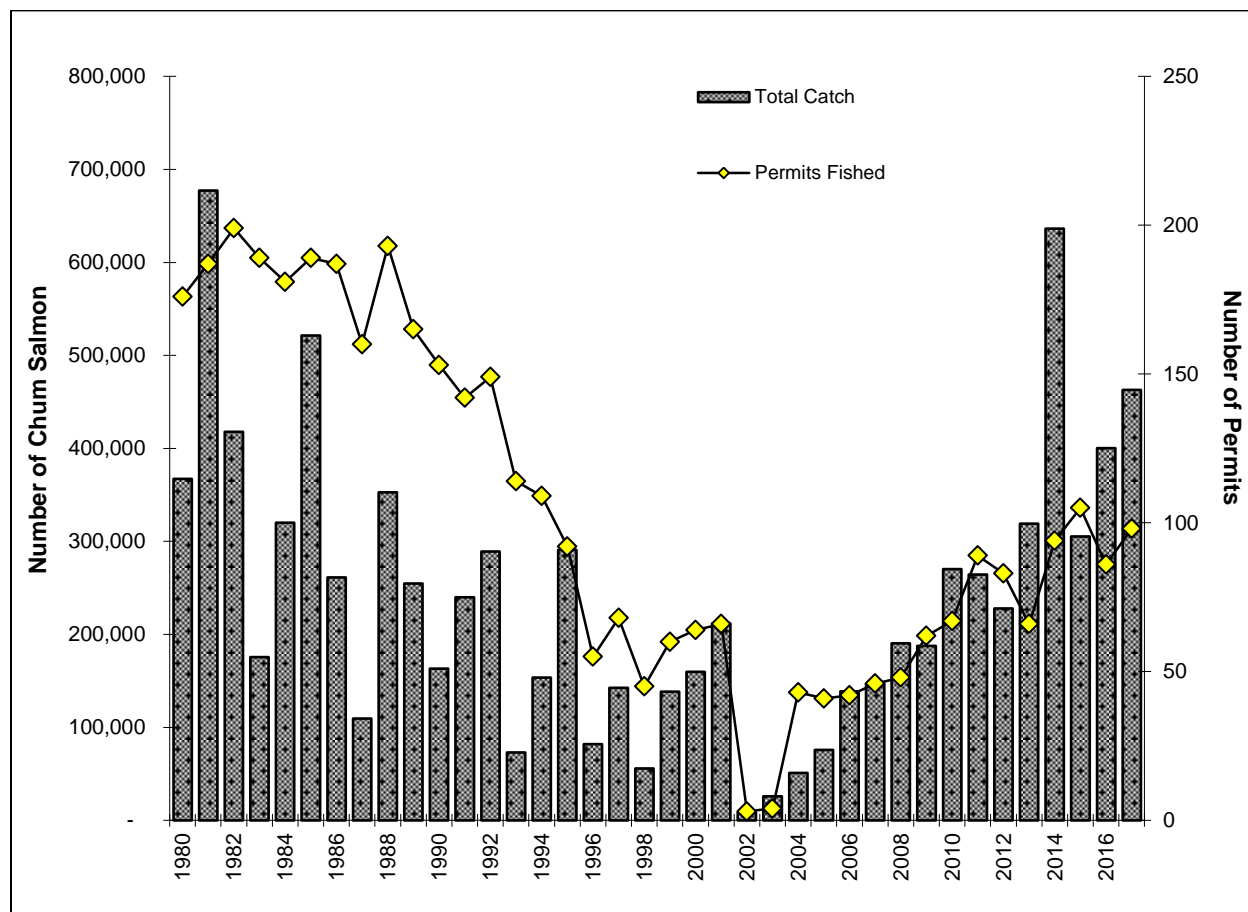


Figure 1.—Kotzebue District commercial chum salmon harvest and number of permits fished, 1980 - 2017.

Table 1.–Kotzebue District chum salmon catch and dollar value, 1962– 2017.

Year	Total Catch	Number of Permits <sup>a</sup>	Average Catch per Permit Holder	Gross Value of Catch to Permit Holders <sup>b</sup>
1962	129,948	84	1,547	\$4,500
1963	54,445	61	893	\$9,140
1964	76,449	52	1,470	\$34,660
1965	40,025	45	889	\$18,000
1966	30,764	44	699	\$25,000
1967	29,400	30	980	\$28,700
1968	30,212	59	512	\$46,000
1969	59,335	52	1,141	\$71,000
1970	159,664	82	1,947	\$186,000
1971	154,956	91	1,703	\$200,000
1972	169,664	104	1,631	\$260,000
1973	375,432	148	2,537	\$925,000
1974	627,912	185	3,394	\$1,822,784
1975	563,345	267	2,110	\$1,365,648
1976	159,796	220	726	\$580,375
1977	195,895	224	875	\$1,033,950
1978	111,494	208	536	\$575,260
1979	141,623	181	782	\$990,263
1980	367,284	176	2,087	\$1,446,633
1981	677,239	187	3,622	\$3,246,793
1982	417,790	199	2,099	\$1,961,518
1983	175,762	189	930	\$420,736
1984	320,206	181	1,769	\$1,148,884
1985	521,406	189	2,759	\$2,137,368
1986	261,436	187	1,398	\$931,241
1987	109,467	160	684	\$515,000
1988	352,915	193	1,829	\$2,581,333
1989	254,617	165	1,543	\$613,823
1990	163,263	153	1,067	\$438,044
1991	239,923	142	1,690	\$437,948
1992	289,184	149	1,941	\$533,731
1993 <sup>c</sup>	73,071	114	641	\$235,061
1994	153,452	109	1,408	\$233,512
1995	290,730	92	3,160	\$316,031
1996	82,110	55	1,493	\$56,310
1997	142,720	68	2,099	\$187,978
1998	55,907	45	1,242	\$70,587
1999	138,605	60	2,310	\$179,781
2000	159,802	64	2,497	\$246,786
2001	211,672	66	3,207	\$322,650
2002	8,390	3	2,797	\$7,572
2003	25,763	4	6,441	\$26,377
2004	51,077	43	1,188	\$64,420
2005	75,971	41	1,853	\$124,820
Average				
1962-2016	214,854	108	2,192	\$649,985

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Year	Total Catch	Number of Permits <sup>a</sup>	Average Catch per Permit Holder	Gross Value of Catch to Permit Holders <sup>b</sup>
2006	137,961	42	3,301	\$229,086
2007	147,087	46	3,198	\$243,149
2008	190,550	48	3,970	\$385,270
2009	187,562	62	3,025	\$376,554
2010	270,343	67	4,035	\$860,125
2011	264,321	89	2,970	\$867,085
2012	227,965	83	2,747	\$567,664
2013	319,062	66	4,834	\$689,163
2014	636,187	94	6,768	\$2,879,016
2015	305,383	105	2,908	\$867,583
2016	400,417	86	4,656	\$1,123,248
2017	463,749	98	4,732	\$1,839,637
Average 1962-2016	214,854	108	2,192	\$649,985

<sup>a</sup> During 1962—1966 and 1968—1971 figures represent the number of vessels licensed to fish in the Kotzebue District, not the number of fishermen.

<sup>b</sup> Some estimates between 1962 and 1981 include only chum value which in figures represent over 99% of the total value. Figures after 1981 represent the chum value as well as incidental species such as Dolly Varden, whitefish and other salmon.

<sup>c</sup> Includes 2,000 chum salmon and \$3,648 from the Sikusuilaq Springs hatchery terminal fishery.